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All Gregorian dates for the month of Muharram subject to the sighting of the new moon.

Special Occasions

- Safar 17 / March 7:**
 - Martyrdom of Imam Ali Al-Reza (AS), 8th Imam
- Safar 20 / March 10:**
 - Chehlum of Imam Hussain (AS)
- Safar 24 / March 14:**
 - Wafat of Bibi Zainab (SA) daughter of Imam Ali (AS)
- Safar 28 / March 18:**
 - Wafat of Holy Prophet (PUBH) & Martyrdom of Imam Hasan (AS)
- Safar 29 / March 19:**
 - Martyrdom of Imam Ali Raza (AS), 8th Imam, (according to some traditions)
- Rabi-al-Awwal 1 / March 20:**
 - Eid-e-Ghadeer
- Rabi-al-Awwal 2 / March 21:**
 - Norouz

Editorial Note

Assalamu Alaikum Brothers and Sisters in Islam

Alhamdulillah, by the Grace of Allah (SWT), the third issue of the bi-monthly e-newsletter is in your hands. The volunteer staff is thrilled and excited about the reception this e-newsletter has received with the Momineen in such a short period. As you can see in this e-newsletter, sisters and brothers have come forth with their thoughts and feelings. These articles are high quality, soul-searching, educational articles. A big round of applause – or shall we say a loud salawaat in the Islamic fashion – to all the writers and their efforts.



The theme of the next e-newsletter is Prophet Mohammad (S.A.). We encourage all sisters and brothers to submit pieces for inclusion.

Articles for the next e-newsletter should be about his life, leadership, message, contributions to the fields of knowledge, science, literature, arts, the fine arts, etc. The deadline to receive articles is March 31, 2007

Please try to submit these articles in Word 6.0 format. Once submitted, these articles become the property of Muslim Congress (MC), and MC reserves the right to edit these articles before publication.

We ask Allah (SWT) for His support and blessings for all Muslimeen in these very challenging times. As followers of the Holy Prophet (SA) and his Ahl-ul-Bayt (AS), we are blessed with role models, but the challenge of living up to the expectations is upon all of us.

To send ideas and suggestions for the e-newsletters, please email us at newsletter@muslimcongress.org.

Viewpoint: Karbala

By Br. Syed Mujahid Hussain

"I would like to bid good and forbid evil, and follow the tradition of my grandfather and father" Said Imam Hussain (A.S.) in 61 A.H.

Martyrdom is an act of sacrifice by a person resulting in their death. It is a sacrifice made by a person fully conscious of the risks and completely willing to face them in the cause of Allah (SWT). To truly learn about martyrdom, who could be a better teacher than the King of the Martyrs – Imam Hussain (AS)?

The Imam left his last will and testament with his brother, Hadhrat Mohammad al-Hanafiyya. In it he wrote: "I have risen to seek reform in the community of my grandfather (the Muslim Ummah); and "I would like to bid good and forbid evil, and follow the tradition of my grandfather and father".

It should be clear to all Muslims that the Imam was talking about correcting the deviation of the Muslims from the Right Path, i.e., Islam. The people in power were changing the last Divine Message delivered by the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH&HF), thereby misleading the Muslim masses. How is this different from today's situation?

Having identified the problem, the Imam proposed an Islamic solution - applying amr bil ma'ruf (inviting good) and nahi `anil munkar (forbidding evil). He then proceeded with the implementation of the solution.

The Imam rejected the demand of pledge of allegiance to the ruling powers. The lesson from this action is that corrupt leadership will demand support for their actions, but it is the Muslim who must decide the worthiness of an action, and who must follow the right and correct leadership.

To inform the Muslims of his decision, the Imam went on Hajj, where he could freely convey his message to the pilgrims from all over the Muslim world. From this action, we learn that it is important to use the most effective means to communicate with the Muslim Ummah.

Then the Imam left Mecca, a day before completing the Hajj– quite a surprising act. He realized that a

- **Rabi-al-Awwal 8 / March 27:**
Martyrdom of Imam Hasan Al-Askari (AS), 11th Imam
- **Rabi-al-Awwal 9 / March 28:**
Eid-e-Nahum/Eid-e-Zahra - Imamatus of 12th Imam begins
- **Rabi-al-Awwal 10 / March 29:**
Marriage of Holy Prophet (PBUH) & Bibi Khadija Al-Kubrah (SA)
- **Rabi-al-Awwal 17/ April 5:**
Birthday of Holy Prophet (PBUH) & Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq (AS)
- **Rabi-al-Awwal 24/ April 12:**
Birthday of Imam Hasan Al-Askari (AS), 11th Imam (according to one tradition)
- **Rabi-al-Thani 8/ April 26:**
Birthday of Imam Hasan Al-Askari (AS), 11th Imam
- **Rabi-al-Thani 10/ April 28:**
Wafat of Fatima Al-Masoomah (SA)

"shock treatment" was needed to awaken the Muslims from their deep slumber, and we too can appreciate this lesson today.

As the Imam traveled from Mecca to Karbala, he ensured that the women and children of his family made the long and tiring journey. The women and children went on to transmit what had happened and what they had learned from the Imam. In this way, Imam Hussain (AS) made sure that the world heard about Islam and that history recorded all that had transpired in Karbala. The lesson from this action is that we need to prepare a way to ensure that the message of Islam is conveyed through time.

Again this year, Muslims all over the world will mark the great tragedy of Karbala and the great sacrifice of Imam Hussain (AS). Countless man-hours and thousands of dollars will be spent once again. However, are the Muslims who honor and adore Imam Hussain (AS) ready to accept his challenge – "Is there any helper to help us?" Are Muslims today following the right/correct leadership? Are Muslims today using the most effective medium to convey the message of Islam? Are the shocks received by the Muslim Ummah in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Kashmir, Karachi, etc. not enough? Are we waiting for a bigger setback? History is being recorded correctly or incorrectly as the Muslims blunder from one situation to the next.

The essence of the message of Imam Hussain (AS) has been lost. The Muslims today seem to reflect the Imam's words, "People have become slaves of worldly things and religion has become a matter of lip-service." Fortunately, by the grace of Allah, it is never too late to get it started. So let's begin NOW.

May Allah (SWT) guide us all to the Right Path and give us the strength to stay on it.

"Is there any helper to help us?"

Hadith for Thought

By Hajj Massoud Nashatizadeh

Imam Sadiq (AS) stated:

إمام جعفر الصادق (ع) قال:
 "مَا مِنْ رَجُلٍ تَكَبَّرَ وَ تَجَبَّرَ إِلَّا
 لِيَذَلَّهُ وَجَدَّهَا فِي نَفْسِهِ."

"No man becomes haughty and arrogant unless he finds in himself a sense of inferiority."

There are times that the flames of haughtiness and insolence rage and thrust the person into the realm of transgression and corruption. At this stage, if others are not affronted, it is called egotism. However, when the stronger attempts to pressure or influence the weaker to take a specific course of action against the better judgment of the latter, it is considered arrogance. These arrogant people in their daily conduct exhibit certain behaviors that indicate the presence of this serious disorder in their character.

Arrogance is a transparent and useless scheme for disguising one's stigma and inadequacies, which further reveals the hidden deficits and abnormalities of one's character. Moreover, arrogance serves as a lightning rod to distract attention from his deep-seated lowliness, and helps to create a frame of mind that allows greater freedom of transgression by the arrogant person. Among the many dangerous symptoms of arrogance, few are more harmful than intolerance and prejudice, and their ravages are far more extensive in both scale and destructiveness. The recent brutal crime of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia is a prime example and a grim reminder of this kind of human moral deficiency.

Oftentimes an arrogant person would not greet the people in lower socio-economic stratum, nor would he interact with them. However, if for some self-serving reason, he appears at a social function, he would make a conspicuous arrival, always followed by a band of naive people, his entourage, and would find his way to the uppermost section of the place of assembly. To confront this mental disorder, Islam recognizes that all human beings are equal. The only criterion for preference in Islam is piety, not gender, wealth, power, status, lineage, race, and not even knowledge. The Holy Qur'an in chapter 49 (Al-Hujurat) verse 32 states:

"إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ
 خَبِيرٌ"

"Surely the most exalted among you in the presence of Allah is the most virtuous among you. Verily Allah is All-knowing and All-aware."

Although there is a delicate balance between piety and humbleness, it is conceivable that someone with spiritual significance may be duped into considering himself better than others. The Holy Qur'an in chapter 53 (An-Najm) verse 32 states:

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"فَلَا تَزْكُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَىٰ"

"Do not consider yourselves preeminent. Allah knows best who is the most righteous."

Accordingly, no one, despite all his qualifications and achievements, can consider himself above others.

Only Allah (SWT) and His chosen representatives (A) can ever legitimately claim preeminence, since only Allah knows who is more pious.

A noteworthy point that should not be overlooked is that piety (iman) and humility are directly correlated. Whenever iman is strengthened, the meekness and humility of the person emerges. This means that, by virtue of increasing iman, the believer is more conscious of the universal order and the supreme authority of its Sustainer. Furthermore, he is aware of his own insignificance and feebleness. It is on this premise that Allah (SWT) institutes humility to His enlightened servants, as He affirms it in chapter 35 (Al-Fatir) verse 28, of the Holy Qur'an:

"إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ"

"Verily! the erudite among His servants fear Allah alone. Lo! Allah is Mighty, Forgiving."

The late Imam Khomeini (RA), in his book on moral principles, Jihadun-Nafs, elucidates that one of the signs of a true believer is that he holds himself less deserving and undistinguished, and considers everyone else better than himself. Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS), in a description of a person of good quality, has stated:

"وَيَرَى النَّاسَ كُلَّهُمْ خَيْرًا مِنْهُ وَأَنَّهُ شَرُّهُمْ فِي نَفْسِهِ"

"He perceives all the people better than himself, and himself lesser in his own mind."

Scholars of Islamic ethics consider arrogance and conceit, known as the grand veil (hijab Akbar) the greatest impediment for achieving excellence and human perfection. A glimpse into the history of religions provides us with a better understanding of why the greatest opposition to Allah's prophets exclusively came from the over-privileged aristocrats, and the arrogant religious hierarchy. They would willfully alter the truth, albeit a divine scripture, to conform to their own power and authority.

Of course, there are many other explanations for the acts of hostility and campaigns against the Holy Prophets and their true representatives (A). However, the most contemptible excuse for their opposition was that they could not be considered equal to their slaves and those from the lower socio-economic stratum. They could not concede to the fact that all mankind are servants of Allah (SWT) and created equal. The Holy Qur'an in chapter 26 (Shu'ara) verse 111, states:

"قَالُوا أَنْوْمِنُ لَكَ وَاتَّبَعَكَ الْأَرْذَلُونَ"

"They said: Shall we put faith in you, when the lowest (of the people) follow you."

The archives of historical references overflow with evidence on the causes of past and present wars, regional and international conflicts, aggressions and exploitations of mankind. In most cases, the prime stimulus is arrogance or its infamous derivatives: bigotry, racism, intolerance, and ethnocentrism.

Man is an enigmatic being, seldom publicizing the things he has and often boasting about those things that he does not have. For example, well-grounded scholars are quick to acknowledge their limitations and lack of knowledge, but the less educated are more likely to express opinion on every subject.

Similarly, those with distinguished personalities and high ethical standards seldom suffer from the moral disorder of arrogance. The Prophet Mohammad (SAW) used to associate with the black, white, poor and downtrodden, and he would eat with slaves and indigents. It is reported that Imam Sadiq (AS) was waving a fan over his sleeping servant so he could rest comfortably. The Holy Prophet (SAW) made his residence in the house of Abu Ayyub al-Ansaari, the poorest man in Medina. Imam Ali (AS) stated:

"عَنْ عَلِيِّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «كَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ مَنَقَصًا أَنْ يُعْظَمَ نَفْسَهُ.»"

"To consider self superior is sufficient (evidence) for a person's (moral) deficiency"

According to Islamic references, Satan was originally a jinn, and his consistent effort had placed him in the ranks of the angels. When Almighty Allah decreed that the angels must prostrate before Prophet Adam (A), Satan, who was lacking the innate purity of an angel, refused to make prostration. To justify his noncompliance, he claimed that fire transcends clay, and since his origin was fire, he was superior to Adam

(A), who was created from clay. Imam Sadiq (AS) observed that: "If Satan had contemplated the spiritual and heavenly aspects of Adam (A), he would not have fallen into (the disgrace of) disobedience".

The plight of Satan is a frightful warning that many spiritual deficits, which provide an impetus to arrogance and other vices, may remain concealed for a long period of time and become inflamed in an instant, engulfing man's lifetime achievements.

The Holy Prophet (SWT) stated:

"لَا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ مَنْ كَانَ فِي قَلْبِهِ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ مِنْ كِبَرٍ."

"Whosoever possesses in his heart arrogance in the amount of a mustard seed would not enter Paradise."

Majalis - How to get the most out of it

By Br. Syed Mujahid Hussain

The month of Muharram is behind us and Safar will be gone before one realizes it. The opportunity to benefit from the majalis - i.e. THE **AHLUL BAIT** OPEN UNIVERSITY will have passed.

Most of us expect a lot from Muharram/Safar, and especially from the majalis. We want to hear about Islam and the event of Karbala, shed a few tears and hope that our tears will be accepted. Because of this emphasis, we tend to lay a heavy demand on the speaker or /a'alim) addressing the majalis. If we are not satisfied we tend to blame it on the speaker.

Here are a few suggestions to help you get the most out of majalis or for that matter out of any seminar/speech.

Thank and pray to Allah (SWT)

Thank Allah for keeping you alive and making so easily available this excellent opportunity to participate and learn. Pray to Allah to give you the strength and patience to take advantage of this wonderful moment. Pray to Allah that all your efforts toward the majlis will be accepted by The Most Glorious One.

Get involved

There is more to a majlis than meets the eye. The holding of a majlis at an Islamic center or Masjid is a major event for the community and is a major commitment. You can always find a way to contribute your time and resources. Ask the organizers -what needs to be done - this will give you an idea where your skills can be effectively utilized.

Desire to hear and learn

Go to the majlis to hear and ponder what is being said. Don't always expect to learn something new. Be prepared to hear and reinforce things you already know.

Read about the subject

If the topic of the majlis has been announced before the Majlis, read about the subject before you go. This will give you an idea as to what you can expect and it will also prepare you to understand the subject matter. If the topic has not been announced, try to find out from the speaker the subject of his lecture, so you may be prepared mentally and spiritually for the subject under discussion.

Sit near the front

I've heard "a professor once did a study and concluded that the farther people sit from the speaker, the less benefit they receive from the speech". Naturally, those most interested sit up front to receive the maximum benefit from the lecture. Another study indicates that students who sit in the first three rows get the highest grades. Other factors enter in, such as desire to learn, but seating does have a significant impact on how well we hear the lecture.

Take notes

Jot down the major points of the lecture/presentation, so you put your mind and hands into the lecture. Some enterprising parents make their children take notes. These notes are then discussed freely in their homes for further reinforcement and practice.

Listen with attention

We all talk to ourselves constantly. Most of us process information in our minds at about 600 words per minute. People usually speak at 150 words per minute. What do we do with our minds the rest of the time? Most of us do little. Remind yourselves to listen attentively. If you find yourselves not listening give yourselves points for not listening, and keep a score. The lower the score, the better you did.

Ask questions

During the majlis, carry out a mental talk with the speaker. Are you sure? Can you prove the point? What references do you have to support this idea? Surprisingly, you will find that the speaker has anticipated your questions and will often try to answer them in the course of the lecture.

Stop the mental wandering

Mind-wandering is a habit that must be broken with a conscious effort. Remind yourself of the importance of the occasion and the message and the benefits you could reap from your presence in this place.

Lay aside personal problems

Forget your personal problems once the majlis has started. Keep your mind off problems. Keep your mind away from this world duniya, and concentrate on the lecture.

Listen with the whole self

Make sure that your body participates in the listening experience. Make sure that any bodily discomfort does not distract you, so that you will listen better.

Talk to the speaker

Finally, talk to the speaker after the majlis. Don't say "Great lecture", or "Sure enjoyed that today". How about, "You know, I never thought about XYZ before..."? Why not ask him for clarification? "I did not understand what you meant by XYZ", or "Can you give some more specific references?". But be careful - don't use this opportunity as a game to show the speaker or others your knowledge.

It is appropriate to disagree, provided it's done discreetly and privately. If you think a clarification is needed about the discussion, make an appointment with the speaker or invite him to lunch or tea, to discuss your disagreement.

Think about the subject

Once in your home, study or think about what you heard. Some speakers just raise issues and want you to take up the necessary research. Look at the pros and cons of the subject. Think how you can apply it to your daily life. Also, think who you know will be able to benefit from this subject and how.

Conclusion

Most of us will attend hundreds of majalis in our lifetime. Some will be powerful and motivating, others will be long and tiring, and others downright confusing. But, one thing is certain: There is a great opportunity for everybody. With a little effort and the right attitude there will always be something for everybody to learn for everybody and to help improve lives. The essence of Islam is continuous improvement toward purity and the propagation of the Divine message, until you answer your call by The Glorious One.

Muharram Across North America

The martyrdom of Imam Hussain (AS), the grandson of the Holy Prophet (SAW) was once again observed by the Muslims in North America during Muharram, the start of the new Islamic year (1427 A.H.). The event was marked by many programs in various languages and locations across the United States and Canada, and a small sampling of these programs is shown here.

Questions	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
In how many languages was the Muharram program conducted?	1	4	2	2	1	1	4	2
Were these Majalis recorded on tape/DVD	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Did these recordings go live on the Internet?	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
Are copies of the programs available?		Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Programs for the Children?		Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Programs for the Youth?	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Programs for the Sisters?		Y	N	N	Y	N	N	
Any Camps, Quizzes, Contests?		N	Y	N	N	N	N	
Any special efforts to encourage participation or motivation for the youth?		Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	
Babysitting arrangements?		Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Supervised activities for children?		Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Efforts for noise control etc.; to improve the quality of the program environment?		N	Y	N		Y	Y	N
Fundraising Efforts?		Y	Y	N		Y	Y	N
Average number of participants daily	200	400	400	30	30	75	500	2000
Maximum number of participants on Ashura	600	1000+	1000+	250	100	120	1200+	3500+
Who were the speakers, and what were the topics of their speeches	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	A: Detroit, MI				E: Louisville, KY			

* Please follow [link](#) for details on the webpages

B: Houston, TX
C: Irving, TX
D: Kansas City, MO

F: San Antonio, TX
G: San Jose, CA
H: Toronto, Canada

Alhamdulillah! The first 10 days (Ashura) of Muharram has passed without any negative reports in the community. Let's all pray to Allah that this blessing continues in the future. Momineen came up with creative and unique solutions to preserve and pass the message of Imam Hussain (AS). As we see from the table, the participation and programs varied from place to place. One thing is certain, momineen are adapting and flourishing. But, this needs to go to the next step, momineen need to share and help each other to optimize their valuable resources.

Some centers had four to five ulamaa on hand while others played tapes. Is it possible for some of the bigger centers to share the blessings with the smaller ones? To achieve this, a formal Islamic center network needs to be set up. Some centers seem to have mastered certain situations, e.g., babysitting and supervised activities for children. Is it possible to share this with others?

It is clear that on the Night and Day of Ashura, the participation easily doubles, creating logistical problems. Is it possible to share the problems and solutions among the different communities? The communities need to work together to create and develop programs to attract the "Ashura crowds" during the rest of the year. Older and established communities seem to have successful programs for children and youth; this valuable asset needs to be tapped by the younger and smaller communities.

"Is there any helper to help us?" – The final appeal of Imam Hussain (AS) on Ashura is calling and challenging the community today to work together to move his message forward. This should be the goal for all momineen.

The Ka'ba – Personal Reflections

Sr. Gretchen – Mesa, AZ.

Several people asked me to write about my Hajj experience, not because I'm some great writer, but I think because I'm what others call a "convert" to Islam. I think at some level, many "born-Muslim" believers think that my impressions and opinions are as close as they can get to understanding what a non-Muslim would think of something. And there really is a huge desire (and need) for Muslims to try to understand and reach non-Muslims regarding Islam. It's a role I play inherently; I know this.



So, Hajj.....I did have pre-conceived notions and expectations derived from what others had told me, and from my need to have a deep spiritual experience. The term 'pilgrimage' for me always had the connotation of simply visiting religiously important sites. Because I didn't grow up as a Muslim, I haven't had very much interaction with people who went on Hajj. And to be honest, if people talk about their Hajj at all, they describe the itinerary – we saw this and went there, etc. I hadn't had the opportunity to hear a lot about the personal spiritual impact that a believer feels on Hajj. Don't get me wrong, learning through others' experience about the Hajj "logistics" is also very important. In fact, I wish that I'd known more about those before I went, but that's another story.

What I want to say here is that the Hajj pilgrimage is so much more than simply visiting the Islamic religious sites.

When I saw pictures of the Masjid-al-Haram, it looked big and beautiful. But seeing it "up-close and personal" was another thing all together. It is a big and beautiful mosque to be sure. When I first walked onto the plaza outside the Haram, the sight was awesome – the intricate architecture, the marble, the gold, the uniqueness. But when I walked out onto the ground floor inside with the Ka'ba in front of me, the power associated with that House just hit me, viscerally. All I saw and felt at that moment was the Ka'ba. Honestly, it was oddly compelling. It seemed HUGE to me, much bigger than I had expected from pictures. "God's House" – the phrase sounds so homey, like "Grandma's house", but the Ka'ba conveys overwhelming power, strength, calm, and, yes, also the security of being in your Grandma's house. I noticed that it was hard for anyone to look away from the Ka'ba, and the 'battle' to touch any part of the structure let alone the Black Stone was fierce, all because everyone wants this connection to something literally out-of-this-world.

I cannot possibly describe the actual sensations properly, but I'm going to at least mention a couple more.

Several times when visiting the Haram, we went to the top level to pray or just look around. The singing of the birds that live in the minarets around the Masjid, and how that sound interacts with the Haram structure is one of the most beautiful sounds I've ever heard. I had the very real sense that I was listening to the sound of Paradise. It gave me such a sense of peace. Just beautiful and rather other-worldly – Allah hu Akbar !

Oh, by the way, the birds fly around the Ka'ba counterclockwise, the direction of the tawaaf. Amazing!

The air in the Haram was another unusual sensation. Now, you'll hear about the pollution in the city – diesel and dust, but somehow when you're near the Ka'ba, the air is soft and caressing. It's as if it's filtered. Weird and wonderful – Alhamdulillah!

I believe that Allah is ever-present. This is for sure; no question. But.....you just KNOW, with an elemental knowledge that He's there on the Hajj – with every cell of your body, and every aspect of your soul. There's something unique that happens on Hajj, and it starts and ends at the Ka'ba – the House of Allah.

Ensha'Allah, I wish that you all will go or go again.



CIRCUMCISION: A Healthy Islamic Order Proven by Science

By Dr. Nafees Hasnie

The Holy Prophet (S.A.), said

"Certainly the earth screams (in complaining) toward Allah for 40 mornings when a non-circumcised person urinates." (Bihar ul-Anwaar, vol.13, page 245)

Here is the du'a that our sixth Imam, Imam Sadiq (AS) told us should be recited by the father of the child at the time of circumcision. Please pay attention to the text:

"O my Lord! This is the sunnah of Yours, and the sunnah of Your Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, and this is for the sake of the fact that we (want to) follow You and Your religion, according to Your will and wish, for the sake of Your command, and Your final decision, Your order, as You made him taste the warmth of the iron in his circumcision and his hair removal, for the sake of something that You know better than me.

O my Lord! So clean him from the sins (or keep him clean from the sins), and increase his age, and remove the calamities from his body, and the pains from his body, and increase his richness, and keep poverty away from him, certainly, You know and we don't know." (Wasaa'il ush-Shia'ah, vol. 21, chapter 59, page 444)

This du'a tells us all the clues to the benefits, almost without a need to elaborate.

We have seen in recent years many examples where the Islamic orders given some 1,400 years ago in Qur'an/Sunnah are now scientifically proven to be beneficial for human beings. This tells us that those orders were not only given to give us rewards in the hereafter, but also to benefit us in this life as well, to form a peaceful, healthy and tranquil society. Circumcision is one such required action for males after birth.

Several recent scientific research studies, conducted in various parts of the world, provide strong evidence that circumcision has a protective effect in the transmission of HIV (AIDS) infection. All the studies showed that circumcision reduces the risk by more than 50 percent of men acquiring the HIV infection through heterosexual relations. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) terminated their ongoing circumcision studies in Kenya and Uganda in December 2006 before completion, because of the overwhelming positive affect seen associated with the experimental group that had been circumcised. They also strongly recommended circumcision of those in the non-circumcised group.

The health benefits of circumcision also include better hygiene, lower risks of contracting other sexually-transmitted diseases or penile cancer. It also lowers the risk of urinary tract infection and cervical cancers in the partners of circumcised men. (This is another benefit of the Islamic order that Muslim women must marry only Muslim men.)

This doesn't give the green light to circumcised men to indulge in sin since any illegitimate sexual relationship is prohibited by Islam, and as we know, Islamic orders are for the betterment of a person and society.

To summarize, the commands of Islam in Qur'an and Sunnah will always be beneficial for human beings and society whether it is proven by science or yet to be proven. Momineen are those who apply the commands of Islam in their lives without waiting for scientific verification.

Q & A with an Aalim

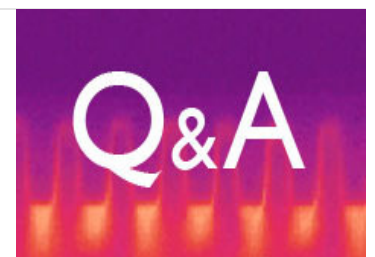
Answers to the questions below received from a group of youth have been provided by Hujjatul Islam, Moulana Syed Abbas Aylea.

Salaat Question

It has been observed that some people pray their salaah separately and individually in parallel to the Jammah salaah. Is this okay?

Answer

This is considered to be an insult (tauheen) in the eyes of 'urf (the Islamically intellectual people of the society) to the Jamaah, and so it should be avoided. If someone doesn't want to pray behind the Imam, he



should not be there at the time of Jamaat. When the Jamaat is installed, i.e. when Jamaat takes place, all those present should join in.

Question

Which direction will I face to offer my salaah, if I am inside the Ka'ba?

Answer

Any direction. However, Imam as-Sadiq (AS) has said that facing towards the side of the Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad), the corner that is called Rukn ul-Hateem, is better.

Muharram

Question

How does one separate the Islamic rituals from the cultural rituals during a Majlis?

Answer

One should look to see if there are any roots (of an action performed in the society) in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) or the Ahlul Bait (AS)? If yes, then it's Islamic. If no, then it's cultural. What do we mean by "cultural"?

1. We differ from one language-speaking area to another, one country to another, one province to another, and even sometimes within one city there are differences. Thus the roots of some actions are based in the local culture and not in the Qur'an or Sunnah of The Prophet (SAW) and Ahlul Bait (AS). Sometimes rituals differ from time to time even in one area. For example, when a tradition is never found 100 years or 50 years or 40 years ago, but is found now.

2. If actions are from the Holy Qur'an or Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and Ahlul Bait (AS), they would be found, more or less, in all places, without the boundaries of language, provinces or countries, and at all times, as all the followers equally believe in the Qur'an or Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) and Ahlul Bait (AS).

Take, for example, the following case:

After slaughtering 72 sheep in some areas of Karachi in the name of 72 shuhadaa (may Allah's salaam be on them), some women come and rub their hand in the blood of the fallen sheep on the ground, and then rub it on their face in the name of Imama Hussain (AS). This action was never found in Ithna Asheri history or in any Ithna Asheri - populated country. That's why it would be classified as a cultural tradition.

Management

Question

Alhamdulillah, Islamic centers are increasing; however, at the same time, qualified speakers/moulana /a'alim are hard to find, especially during the Holy Months of Ramadhan, Muharram, and Safar? How can this issue be addressed?

Answer

Parents should realize their responsibility to send their kids to learn the limitless knowledge of the Prophet (SAW) or the Ahlul Bait (AS), so that we will have competent ulamaa available in the future.

If they don't, they should stop expecting Allah (SWT) to change their destiny with miracle, as Allah (SWT) never changes the destiny of peoples unless the people change themselves.

When the time comes to choose a profession, what options are put on the table by some of us in front of the kids; professions that bring more money? Or those professions which please Seyyida Fatimah (AS) more, although they may seem to have less associated salary? (Keep in mind that with respect to money, we get what is fixed by Allah anyway, nothing more, nothing less, believe it or not.) Here is the true litmus test of our love for the Ahlul Bait (AS), not just lip-service claims.

I personally think if our community doesn't do its homework in time, we may have a grave shortage of qualified ulamaa here in the United States.

Well, our Prophet (SAW) said: "Islam is to rise and nothing can rise over it". Islam will survive; Allah will have His beloved people come forward and serve His cause. However, Islam will prosper by some others, and we will be left behind with our love of the earthly world (dunya), as losers.

One thing is for sure: Islam can never lose. Its success was guaranteed by the blood of our beloved Imam Hussain (AS) and little Ali Asghar (AS).

Let's act more, and speak less before we die.

Question

Here in America - the melting pot - momineen are primarily congregating on language or nationalistic lines? This doesn't appear to promote Islamic unity. How can this issue be addressed?

Answer

The Holy Prophet (SAW) and Ameer ul-Momineen (AS) taught us and propagated the concept of one Muslim family (nation), and strove hard for the unity of all Muslims. There is no place in Islam for the language or cultural things to cause divisions or harm the more important goals of unity.

Question

Currently, Islamic centers and masjids are managed primarily by the older often immigrant generation. The management style seems to be alienating the younger generation - especially the kids born and raised in this country. How should or can this be handled?

Answer

By correcting our source of Islamic information; by following wise and muttaqi (pious - abstaining from all haram) ulamaa, and avoiding the unqualified people who have not studied in Najaf or Qum or any other recognized Islamic institution.

For everything, there is a qualification required. When you seek a job, they ask you your qualifications, your job experience, right? Let's look at what some of us have done to our own faith and its future. We let anyone stand in the pulpit (mimbar) and say what they please or what pleases us, regardless of looking whether he is pleasing Sayyida Fatima Az-Zahraa (AS) or not. When some of us have reached this level of obeying cultural teachings, the gap between old and young is understandable.

Some youth may be standing outside the Masjid during the program, some may end up marrying non-believers (kuffar), and you name it. Any kind of deviation is expected, when some of us are trying to impose our culture on them, instead of teaching the beautiful logical teachings of Ahlul Bait (AS). These good teachings have evidences that can only be learned from the qualified muttaqi ulamaa (who may not please us but will certainly please Seyyida Fatimah (AS) since they are muttaqi).

Inside Report from the Muharram annual camp of MOMIN

**By Zaki Razvi, Flower Mound, TX
Age: 15 - 10th Grade**

Recently, the Islamic Center of MOMIN in Irving, Texas, hosted its annual all-night camp for the youth during the first ten days of Muharram. It consisted of activities for children ages five to 13, such as quizzes on Karbala, a Karbala word search, Qur'anic knowledge competition, Islamic Bingo™, and Islamic Jeopardy™. Refreshments were provided for the participants after the first round of activities, and then the second round was completed. Participants were given tickets and they were able to choose prizes from a variety of Islamic items, e.g., rulers, bookmarks, etc. After Jeopardy™, the children viewed a movie about Karbala, and then slept for a few hours. After waking for Fajr salaah, the children enjoyed a hot and cold breakfast and everyone went home. The number of children that participated far surpassed the hopes of the organizers and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive from kids and parents alike.

I volunteered at the camp, and was very happy with the overall turnout, as well as the learning opportunities. I feel that many of the children actually understood Imam Hussain's (AS) sacrifice. That is what I feel is one of the most important things for the Islamic center to do during Muharram; it needs to connect with the youth. Centers can host an all-night camp, have a youth meeting with visiting moulanas, have a contest where the children take notes on the majalis, create an inclusive, month-long quiz for the children over the current speeches. Do something, anything, to involve the youth, because the youth are the future, and we must shape the youth so they will carry on Imam Hussain's (AS) message, and so they will not waver in their faith or determination.

Already, I have seen how the message of Imam Hussain (AS) has affected the youth. Many of the children cry with the adults during the retelling of the tragedies in the English majlis, and they do matam as hard as any full grown man. It makes me proud to see the respectful young members of the community doing their best for Imam Hussain (AS) because they truly understand, not just because it is what is expected. However, we must continue to encourage this devotion, lest it be lost in the tumult of growing up.

The Message of Karbala "Every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala"

By Shayan Hemani, Carrollton, TX - Age 14

Before discussing the messages that we get from Karbala, it is important to know why we are looking for messages from other things. After all, why are we always analyzing past events, their causes and results? Why is history so important for us? The time that has passed is gone forever, so what's the use of wasting more time looking back? It is because, if we really understand this "history thing", it can just revolutionize our lives. This important "thing" is called "ibrat." Ibrat is derived from "uboor", which means: crossing or passing through.

But ibrat is not just passing through; rather it's traveling from the present into the past, with the purpose of taking lessons from the past for our future. History can function as a source of experience, whose canvas is much vaster than ours, and we can learn from it in the same way that we learn from our personal experience. And since we give importance to learning from our own experience, the experience of others should also command importance, perhaps even greater importance, if only to be more efficient in attaining unlimited goals with our limited lives. It is more efficient and saves you time and energy if you learn from your experience and the experience of others.

With this view, we look at a few points of Karbala.

1. The most important lesson that we get from Karbala is the revival of the Islamic religion. When Imam Hussain (AS) saw that the religion was taking its last breaths in society, due to the policies of Bani Umayyad, he and his followers sacrificed their lives for the life of religion. He said that there is no other way for the uprightness of Prophet Mohammed's (SAW) religion to continue other than getting killed; "O swords!", he said, "Come and kill me." Imam Hussain (AS) was seeing the future of Islam with someone like Yazid as the caliph. He felt a great danger threatening the life of Islam so he sacrificed his own life to save Islam.

2. Fulfilling one's duties and responsibilities to Allah is another lesson that we take from Karbala. One should contemplate what Allah expects to see from him, no matter the consequences. The expected success or defeat is not the basis for choosing to do something or not.

3. We also learn from Karbala that ideology is more important than the individual. That's why one should sacrifice everything he has for the sake of his ideology. Imam Hussain (AS) also did the same thing. He sacrificed all his possessions, his family, and his friends for the safekeeping of the religion and did not worry about his own safety.

4. Unveiling falsehood is another lesson we learn from Karbala. Imam Hussain (AS) continuously made the Ummah aware of the true ambitions of Bani Umayyad. He showed the people the actual faces of the oppressors so that no one would follow them in darkness, and those who were in the search of truth could select the path of Imam Hussain (AS). Then as now, this is not an easy task, as it needs insight rather than merely vision. And the thicker the veil, the more difficult it is to see behind it. That's why we see that Imam Hussain (AS) was very firm in his decision and rejected all other opinions and advice given by some of his well-wishers. He had the insight that others were lacking. We should ask Allah to give us insight, too, so that we don't get deceived by the beautiful masks covering ugly realities.

5. Another important teaching of Karbala is the revival of the practice of inviting good and forbidding evil (Amr bil Maroof and Nahi anil Munkar). Imam Hussain (AS) mentions this in the mission statement he gave at the start of his movement. In his will to Mohammed Hanafiyah (A) he said that, "I am not going out for merrymaking or with selfish desires, neither for spoiling nor for oppressing. But I have risen up for rectification of the Ummah. I want to perform Amr bil Maroof and Nahi anil Munkar and to follow the path of my grandfather Mohammed (SAW) and my father Ali (AS)."

6. Karbala also teaches us to live with honor. Imam Hussain (AS) elected to die with honor since there was no way left to live with it. He considered living with the oppressors and submitting to them such a disgrace and shame that he preferred to die with honor.

7. If we look at the event of Karbala, we find that prayers and supplications were of utmost importance. Imam Hussain (AS) asked for a night's reprieve from the enemy so that he and his family and friends could worship their beloved Allah. On the day of Ashura we see the emphasis on praying. All this reflected the love of the Imam and his true followers for the worship of Allah. This was the aim they had chosen for their lives. All these efforts and sacrifices were for the sake of inviting people for the true worship of the true God. However, it should be kept in mind that worshipping is not simply praying five times a day or fasting and performing Hajj, rather these are some examples of ways to worship Him. The actual worship is the submission of the self to Allah. This submission leaves no will for the worshipper other than the will of Allah. The importance of salaah, then, might be due to the actions we perform during it, actions that remind us of our reality - we are real slaves and we have to bow down toward Him. We should stand straight with our heads down in front of Him to listen to His orders. These orders might be anything in any aspect of life, may it be individual, social, economical, political, in speaking or keeping silent, in taking a stand or being calm, and so on. This aspect of Karbala is still shining in history and will shine forever as a beacon for all humanity.

Thus if we look at Karbala as only an event that has passed in history, it will result in tears from our eyes for the martyrs. Yet, if we look at Karbala as a beacon, it will guide us to travel in the right direction with our eyes weeping, but with the satisfaction of our souls and the happiness of our Imam Hussain (AS) and his companions.

Karbala

By Syed Abbas Zaidi, Sunnyvale, CA

Age: 13 - 8th Grade

Hussain, my master and my leader,
Please guide me to your way.
I want to help you every instant of my life every day.

Your baby Ali Asghar was so ruthlessly killed.
With a large pool of blood your arms were filled.
Life ebbed from your tiny little angel as he died.
In heaven this little martyr will abide.

We will mourn your death all of our life.
We'll never forget this evil, horrendous strife.
Our tears come pouring like torrents of rain.
O please accept them, O my dear Hussain.

Young Akbar flew through the enemy,
Fighting them all.
He killed so many of them.
He stood brave and tall.

But he too in the end uttered a distressed cry,
As he fell on the sands that were burning and dry.
Despairing, his father came for the darling son,
That went from this world and left everyone.

An arrow had hit his chest,
And pierced it with might.
Blood poured like a fountain,
Ending the life of this light.

Abbas was like a diamond,
The sparkling, powerful rock.
When he entered the battlefield,
The enemy would hear death knock.

Abbas, the shining star at night,
Had gone for water and not to fight.

At the time of battle, Abbas soared.
But he too was killed and blood gushed and poured.
An arrow smashed into him and his body it tore.
This brave martyr then flew to heaven's door.

Qasim was so magnificent.
Like a shining sunset,
Valiantly struggling,
He met his tragic death.
Like the Sun he too faded away.
He met his end on that gruesome day.

Poor Sakina watched this horrible scene.
She saw the infidels crush Qasim.
Oh, they were so mean.

4-year-old Sakina watched as her relatives died.
Waterfalls of tears, she cried and cried.
Heartbroken, she wept for her family with despair.
They had looked after her with great love and care.

Hussain, himself then went out to fight.
His goal and message was to turn things right.
The way he fought was a truly inspiring sight.
He battled like a lion, filled with awe-striking might.

On the day of Ashura,
Hussain's face glowed with noor.
His goal of sacrifice he had achieved.
An invitation from Allah he had received.

O, Zainab what problems you had to go through.
What troublesome things you had to do.
Your sacrifice's result will always go on.
The true way of life will never be gone.

O, Hussain, the memory of Karbala will always remain.
We will remember this event with misery and pain.
It will always burn in our hearts like a fiery flame.
Without you, Islam would never be the same.

Imam Hussain gave his life for you and me.
This sacrifice of Hussain can we not see?
The remembrance of Hussain should always shine.
How great was he: strong, merciful, and fine.

The message of Karbala will always live on
In the minds of everyone Hussain's true purpose will dawn.
His sacrifice will never be wasted at all.
All of his Ummah will answer his call.

Feedback Solicitation

If you would like to contribute towards future issues of **VOW**, the bi-monthly Muslim Congress newsletter, please send an email with your content, write-up or suggestions to newsletter@musimcongress.org. You can also email questions to be answered by an Aalim in our 'Ask-the-Aalim' section. Thank you.

"Islam is founded on five pillars: Salat, Zakat, Hajj, Sawm (fasting), and Walayah; People took the first four, and left this (Walayah). I swear to Allah, they cannot complete/perfect the four, unless they complete them through the fifth one (Walayah)"

Hadith of Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) narrated in al-Kaafi, by Zurarah ibn Aayan.